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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001309

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY
ALSO FOR IO ACTING A/S HOOK AND PDAS WARLICK
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/YERGER/MCDERMOTT
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AA/ME LAUDATO/SCOTT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2018
TAGS: [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [SENV](#) [PINR](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: INDEPENDENT SHIA MINISTER OF
ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM WANTS REAL COORDINATION ON
DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

REF: A. BEIRUT 1113
[1](#)B. BEIRUT 908

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Independent Shia and March 14-appointed Minister of Administrative Reform Ibrahim Shamseddine, showing a remarkable mastery of the inner workings of his ministry, the Lebanese government, and various development projects taking place in Lebanon, explained to the Ambassador and Acting USAID Director the functions of his unique ministry. He laid out his plan for encouraging administrative reform across government ministries, and argued for increased coordination among Lebanese government agencies and foreign and international aid agencies on development projects across Lebanon. Shamseddine reiterated that he would run in the parliamentary elections in spring 2009, and said he would continue in his position as director of the Islamic Cultural Center in Beirut, founded by his greatly-respected late father, Imam Mohammed Mehdi Shamseddine. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Ambassador, Acting USAID Director, USAID FSN, and EconOff met September 3 with Minister of State for Administrative Reform Ibrahim Shamseddine, Senior ICT Program Manager Najib Korban, Director of the Technical Cooperation Unit Nasser Israoui, and Solid Waste Project Coordinator Rola Kabbani at Shamseddine's ministry office in downtown Beirut. Although the Embassy's last encounter with him had focused on political topics (ref A), Shamseddine had requested this meeting to discuss bilateral assistance matters.

"I DON'T SELL COMPUTERS"

[1](#)3. (C) Shamseddine presented the responsibilities of his ministry, known as OMSAR (Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform), acknowledging that most in the Lebanese government view it as the place to get their computers. "This is not a computer office," he said crisply. Shamseddine explained that in fact supplying IT systems was supposed to be part of a larger package of reforming the structure of public administration, streamlining operations, and spreading best practices. He said that his ministry puts

together flow charts and organigrams for government ministries and sends them to the ministers for review. Many do not respond. "But this is fine, because as soon as they come to me for computers, I tell them I need to get their response and then we can talk about their computers."

FROM COMPUTERS TO... SOLID WASTE?

¶4. (SBU) Shamseddine said he was surprised to find out that his ministry had responsibility for solid waste treatment projects in certain parts of Lebanon. (Note: Some time ago, the EU had asked OMSAR to use leftover funds from an administrative reform project it had funded for a solid waste project. The EU has since given OMSAR funds for local development projects, NGO support, and other purposes. End note.) Shamseddine said he understood that USAID had been setting up solid waste projects in Lebanon for the his past 5-6 years, and he knew from past experience that the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) was doing the same. CDR had, in fact, done a national master plan for solid waste management. (Note: Shamseddine was Vice President of CDR from 1991-1996. End note.) Shamseddine was concerned that there was no coordination among all these actors, and no means of providing feedback.

¶5. (SBU) The Ambassador and Acting USAID Director explained that the current USAID solid waste projects were channeled through the municipalities and the Ministry of Interior, but that the USG is certainly interested in coordinating with all interested parties. Acting USAID Director suggested a

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roundtable format, where working level people from various agencies and donors might exchange information and share experiences to avoid duplicating efforts.

¶6. (SBU) Shamseddine agreed that the roundtable format would be useful. He said it should include OMSAR, UNDP, USAID, CDR, the EU, and the Ministry of Finance. As part of his ministry's mandate to cut waste, he would like to receive information on similar development projects of all types, to avoid duplication or incompatibility. For example, Najib Korban expressed concern that a 10 million Euro EU project aimed at judicial reform might somehow conflict with a new USAID project in the same arena. Acting USAID Director agreed to follow up, and the Ambassador mentioned the upcoming visit of USAID Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Middle East James Bever, promising to introduce him to the Minister.

A WILL TO SERVE

¶7. (SBU) Asked about the parliamentary elections in 2009, Shamseddine reiterated his previous statements to the Ambassador (Ref A) that he would run again for a parliamentary seat, though he lost in his 2005 contest. "I will be running, I don't know about political coalitions, I don't care, I have to run to serve the people." In the same vein, Shamseddine said he would continue as head of the Islamic Cultural Center of Beirut, working in his office there on Wednesdays, and juggling responsibilities the rest of the week. (Note: Although appointed to the Cabinet by the March 14 majority, Shamseddine fiercely retains his independent stature. End Note.)

COMMENT

¶8. (C) Shamseddine, the only non-opposition Shia in the Cabinet, who has impressed the Embassy in the past with his independent thinking and attempts to stay above the political squabbling typical in Lebanon. Just weeks into taking on his new Cabinet role he was impressively well-versed in the functions of his new ministry and had a clear vision of what

he wanted it to accomplish. He spoke broadly of transparency and accountability one moment, then spoke in detail on the minute problems of administering landfills, waste water treatment plants, and bureaucratic ministerial structures the next. In response to a suggestion from USAID FSN that legislative change might be necessary to provide the resources to keep waste treatment plants sustainable, he immediately said, "I can call Ziad and Mohammed to talk about that," referring to Interior Ministry Ziad Baroud and Finance Minister Mohammed Chatah. He clearly intends to accomplish as much as possible during his short time in office. As the sole independent Shia minister in this Cabinet, his profile is much higher than his OMSAR title would suggest. Many in the Shia community will be looking to him as a key leader in the run-up to the spring 2009 parliamentary elections. Shamseddine's presence in the Cabinet ensures that the opposition cannot play the "Shia card" by having all the Shia ministers resign again, thereby declaring the GOL illegitimate, as had happened in 2006. End comment.

SISON